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BULLETIN

OF

THE FREE LIBRARY

OF PHILADELPHIA

NUMBER 7

DESCRIPTIVE ACCOUNT OF THE
LOWER DUBLIN ACADEMY AND OF
THE THOMAS BRANCH OF
THE FREE LIBRARY OF
PHILADELPHIA

BY

JOHN THOMSON

WITH ADDRESS DELIVERED MAY 23, 1906

BY

COLONEL WILLIAM BENDER WILSON

PHILADELPHIA, JUNE, 1907





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OF

The Free Library of Philadelphia

The opening of the new Thomas Holme Branch Library Building seems a convenient opportunity for collecting and putting in permanent form a record of the history of the movement which has culminated to-day in the opening for the benefit of the public of this attractive and pleasant building.

This educational movement has had a long and somewhat varied career. It owes its inception to Captain Thomas Holme, of Waterford, Ireland, who died in 1695. He was appointed Surveyor General of the Province of Pennsylvania by William Penn, and drafted the original plans of the City of Philadelphia. By his will, dated in 1684, he gave four pounds to Dublin Township for school purposes. His son-in-law and executor, Silas Crispin, died without making provision for this bequest, and in 1723, Thomas Crispin, Thomas Holme's grandson, set aside a lot of ground comprising two acres for a school in lieu of the bequest of four pounds in the will. The plot formed a part of an important tract of land known as "Well Spring Plantation," above Holmesburg, which was the property of Thomas Holme. Thomas Holme set aside one other acre of the Well Spring Plantation, near Rowland's Station, on the Bustleton Branch of the Pennsylvania Railroad, about a mile northwest from the Main Street of Holmesburg, for a burying ground for himself and his descendants. This was commonly known as the Old Crispin Burying Ground, but was incorporated in 1840 as the Crispin Cemetery.

Captain Holme died in 1695, aged 71 years, and was buried in this cemetery, where a monument was erected to his memory in 1863 by the Trustees of the Lower Dublin Academy, a corporation chartered in 1794 to manage the school carried on from 1723 on the land set aside by Holme's heirs for that purpose.

On November 10, 1855, the Academy property was leased to the Controllers of the Public Schools of the First School District of Pennsylv-

vania, and a free public school was established there called "The Thomas Holme School." The original funds were increased from time to time by moneys raised for the purpose and used for the erection and support of the Lower Dublin Academy.

At a meeting of citizens held in February, 1867, with Dr. W. Scott Hendrie presiding, it was decided that a public subscription library should be established in the village. The organization was formed under the title of the Holmesburg Reading Room and Library Association, with Dr. Hendrie as president and Mr. Robert G. Crispin as librarian; and a Library was started in the main room of the Athenæum Building, which gradually accumulated 1,109 volumes and a considerable quantity of furniture.

The establishment, however, of the free school system of Pennsylvania, having rendered the continuance of the Trust in its original form unnecessary, it was by a decree of the Court of Common Pleas, dated July 3, 1880, ordered that the Trustees should be empowered to divert the income arising from the Trust property then in their hands to the maintenance of a Free Public Library in Lower Dublin Township.

The action of the Trustees in petitioning the Court for leave to take charge of the library was largely influenced by the interest and energy of Dr. James Burd Peale, President of the old library and a Trustee of the Lower Dublin Academy. Dr. Peale died in March, 1881.

At a meeting of the Trustees of the Lower Dublin Academy, held July 8, 1880, a committee was appointed to accept and take charge of the property of the Holmesburg Library "free of debt". The committee consisted of Dr. James Burd Peale, Chairman, and Messrs. Joseph H. Brown, George S. Clark, Andreas Hartel and Maxwell Rowland, and the Library was thereafter known as the Thomas Holme Free Library of Philadelphia.

By bill of sale, signed by the owners and dated July 12, 1880, all the property of the Library was donated to the Trustees of the Lower Dublin Academy. The committee appointed Mr. J. Howard Morrison as the first Librarian.

The Library proved of great value to the neighborhood, and Mr. G. S. Clark, in a sketch of the Library published in 1898, mentions that during the ten years ending November 1, 1897, 51,227 books were loaned; that during the six months ending November 1, 1897, the number of books loaned was 3,040, and that on May 1, 1898, the number of volumes was 3,135, a net gain of 2,026 over those possessed at the date of the transfer to the then management.

In a paper like this it is impossible to enter into many details. It is fortunate for those who are interested in Thomas Holme and his times

and the historical matters pertaining to the school and neighborhood that Samuel C. Willits completed, in 1885, a beautifully written manuscript of 437 closely written pages, giving the complete history of the trust and the neighborhood, and presented it to the Trustees of the Lower Dublin Academy, of which body he was a member for more than thirty years. This book ought to be printed and published, as it contains much historical matter which it is wrong to leave embodied in a manuscript that by misfortune or fire might be destroyed and involve the loss of a great deal of interesting material which it would be impossible to re-collect. This manuscript was presented to and is the property of the Trustees of the Lower Dublin Academy, into whose possession it came in 1884.

A copy of this manuscript has been made for the printers, should it be possible to find necessary funds to publish the book, and so the original manuscript can always be preserved intact.

It is interesting to know that the Catalogue of the Holme Free Library of Holmesburg, dated May 1, 1898, was the first book ever actually printed in Holmesburg. The work was done by Edgar B. Morrison, who was at that time the Librarian.

The best accounts of the School and Academy will be found in Mr. George S. Clark's Sketch of the Library, prefaced to the above-mentioned Catalogue, the Reverend Dr. S. F. Hotchkin's "Bristol Pike", and, of course, in the Willits Manuscript.

The Athenæum Building, now converted into a Trust Company's Headquarters, was erected by the Odd Fellows in 1850, and was for a long time used as the Town Hall. The Thomas Holme Free Library was established in one of the rooms of this building, but after some years it was found to be absolutely necessary to obtain larger quarters than could be found in the Athenæum. Early in 1898 Messrs. George S. Clark, Jonathan Rowland and Henry V. Massey, a committee representing the Trustees of the Lower Dublin Academy, placed themselves in communication with the Board of Trustees of The Free Library of Philadelphia, and it quickly became apparent that there was an opening for a great public work if the two corporations would work together. Mr. Benjamin Franklin Crispin, a lineal descendant of Thomas Holme, was then President of the Lower Dublin Academy Board. Mr. Crispin died in July, 1898, at an advanced age, and Mr. Andreas Hartel was elected President to succeed him, and still holds that office. Many of the most important movements for the advancement of the library have been successfully carried out during Mr. Hartel's administration, and he has always taken a most active and influential part in aiding to develop the Library movement in Holmesburg.

Between the dates 1898 and 1900 negotiations were carried on between a committee of the Trustees of the Lower Dublin Academy, consisting of Messrs. Andreas Hartel (ex officio), George S. Clark, Jonathan Rowland and Henry V. Massey to effect an affiliation of the Thomas Holme Free Library with The Free Library of Philadelphia. When this was finally arranged the Holmesburg Board, by agreement dated December 30, 1899, transferred to The Free Library its collection of books, then numbering 3,020 volumes, and undertook to pay the rent of the principal room in the Holmesburg Athenæum Building, the lease of which was assigned to the Trustees of The Free Library, and it was decided to retain the name of Thomas Holme as the title of the Branch, he having been the founder of the original trust.

Various alterations were made in the rooms appropriated to Library purposes, and on Tuesday, March 27, 1900, the Branch was opened to the public. The entire building was crowded, and Mr. Joseph G. Rosengarten, President of The Free Library of Philadelphia, presided. Mr. Hartel was unavoidably absent, owing to illness, but Mr. George S. Clark, Dr. Hotchkin, of Bustleton, and others represented the village. The building was opened with interesting ceremonies, including addresses by Mr. Rosengarten, Dr. Hotchkin, Mr. William B. Wilson, Mr. George S. Clark, the Rev. John B. Laird and the Librarian.

Valuable as was this affiliation and the structural improvement of the premises for library purposes, it was with very great satisfaction that, owing to the munificent gift of Mr. Andrew Carnegie for the erection of Branch Libraries in Philadelphia, it was made possible to have a suitable modern Library Building in the place of the Athenæum premises.

The Trustees of the Lower Dublin Academy made an application to the Court of Common Pleas, pursuant to which a decree was granted authorizing the Trustees of the Academy to purchase for the sum of \$5,000, and convey to the city of Philadelphia as a site for a Free Library Branch, a lot of ground at the northwest corner of Frankford Avenue and Hartel Street, with a frontage on Frankford Avenue of 100 feet and a depth on Hartel Street of (approximately) 159 feet. This property having been conveyed to the city by deed dated April 3, 1905, the Board of Trustees of The Free Library authorized the Carnegie Fund Committee to erect the present building, to be known as the Thomas Holme Branch of The Free Library of Philadelphia. The number of 5,200 books in the Branch when it was opened in the Athenæum Building has been increased to nearly 8,000 volumes, and it is hoped that this number will be steadily added to.

The occasion of the corner-stone laying on May 23, 1906, was a

gala day for the village. The streets and the residences were decorated with bunting and flags. About 650 school children, each provided with a flag by Mr. William Boal, helped to make the occasion bright and satisfactory. The Germania Brass Band of Tacony assisted and the children of the Joseph Brown Public School, in charge of Principal Moore, and those of the Thomas Holme School, headed by Principal Neville accompanied by their teachers, and the pupils of St. Dominick's Roman Catholic Parochial School accompanied by Mr. John McFadden, reached the building in procession, and the scene was very attractive. Addresses were delivered by the President, Mr. J. G. Rosengarten, Mr. George S. Clark, Mr. Henry R. Edmunds, President of the Board of Education, the Librarian, Mr. John Thomson, and others. The principal address took the form of a glowing eulogy of Mr. Andrew Carnegie by Colonel William Bender Wilson, whose acquaintance with Mr. Carnegie has extended over more than half a century, they both having worked together "at the same craft on the western slope of the Allegheny Mountains". A copy of Colonel Wilson's paper is printed by way of Appendix to this account of the Branch.

The architects of the building are Messrs. Stearns & Castor, and Mr. H. W. Castor and Mr. William R. Dougherty, the general contractor, assisted in the corner-stone laying.

The building speaks for itself. As a matter of record it may be mentioned that the main room measures 42 feet by 62, and the auditorium or lecture-room measures 36 feet by 45. The whole building has been constructed at a cost of \$38,000.

The first Librarian-in-charge of the Branch was Miss Suzelle R. Howat. On her resignation, a few months after her appointment, Miss Katherine M. Petty was appointed as her successor and has proved herself able in the administration of the Branch and popular with the residents.

Within the last few weeks the Trustees of the Lower Dublin Academy have shown the earnestness of their interest in the Library by purchasing a piece of land adjoining the Library, with a frontage of 50 feet on Frankford Avenue and (approximately) 159 feet in depth. This purchase has been formally approved by a decree of the Court of Common Pleas dated June 3, 1907, and the land will be conveyed to the city as an addition to the Library site.

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APPENDIX

ADDRESS

OF

Colonel William Bender Wilson

DELIVERED AT THE

Laying of the Corner-stone

OF THE

Carnegie Building

FOR THE

THOMAS HOLME BRANCH

OF

The Free Library of Philadelphia

